

## 212-05: INDUSTRIAL LAND USE: YEAR 2020

### 05-01: Introduction

From the foregoing we can make a reasonable attempt to portray Rhode Island's capabilities in industrial land use. The maps presented at the end of each substate area discussion illustrate the industrial development potential (IDP) of occupied land and vacant land, as determined by limitations in size, physiographic conditions, and infrastructure. Any changes in zoning or infrastructure would, of course, affect the IDP, and need to be monitored periodically to keep the maps up to date.

### 05-02: Industrial Land Development Potential

The original *Industrial Land Use Plan* introduced an IDP classification system. As the numerical designation moved upward, so did the potential of the land. Thus IDP-0 land, whether IDP-0(d) or IDP-0(r), had no potential (either fully developed or recommended for rezoning), and IDP-3 had the greatest potential (prime industrial land without physiographic constraints).

As a result of our calculations in Part 212-02 (see pages 2.6 and 2.7), the staff determined that 13,607 acres of industrial land would be needed to sustain Rhode Island industries in the year 2020, or nearly 2,500 acres in addition to what is presently in industrial use. We also determined that, while 15,224 acres of industrial land were vacant (undeveloped), only 1,485 acres fit the definition of "prime," and not all of these acres would be construction-ready. As Table 212-05(1) shows, 676 of the 1,485 acres are CERCLIS sites, with environmental contamination confirmed or suspected. Even if this cloud could be lifted with site remediation, there would still be an apparent shortfall of over 1,000 "prime" industrial acres.

We were left with the question, how can we make up the shortfall in industrial-zoned land? Moreover, how can we prevent the loss of land that is currently zoned industrial to other uses, and ultimately to rezoning?

Table 212-05(1) suggests Rhode Island has a large pool of land in the second-highest IDP classification, IDP-2, that could be improved (i.e., elevated to IDP-3, prime status) for future industrial use. Consideration of any of these sites, however, must be done on a case-by-case basis. (This also applies to the IDP-3 sites that are on the CERCLIS list.)

Land classified IDP-2 is defined on page 4.3 as "of moderate potential...as determined by the site's size, accessibility, and level of infrastructure, and the degree to which poor soils, aquifers, wetlands, and flood hazards can be avoided." While in some instances improvements to infrastructure can be made or environmental constraints mitigated, a site's size and accessibility can be limiting factors that make any elevation of development potential impossible. Expansion of neighboring

**TABLE 212-05(1):  
VACANT INDUSTRIAL-ZONED ACREAGE BY  
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL (IDP) CLASSIFICATION**

<i>Substate Growth Area</i>	<i>IDP-0(r) acres</i>	<i>IDP-1 acres</i>	<i>IDP-2 acres</i>	<i>IDP-3 acres<sup>1</sup> CERCLIS</i>	<i>IDP-3</i>
<b>District 1 total</b>	5	183	3,349	596	303
<b>District 2 total</b>	89	165	0	0	0
<b>District 3 total</b>	168	861	1,136	242	0
<b>District 4 total</b>	0	29	93	16	2
<b>District 5 total</b>	0	877	596	45	45
<b>District 6 total</b>	8	2,183	824	32	0
<b>District 7 total</b>	175	104	735	529	326
<b>District 8 total</b>	158	0	2,143	25	0
<b>Statewide total</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>4,402</b>	<b>8,876</b>	<b>1,485</b>	<b>676</b>
Statewide total, 1988	1,395	2,059	13,188	1,233	n/a

<sup>1</sup> Includes IDP-3 CERCLIS sites.

**Source:** Statewide Planning Program Industrial Land Inventory (1997-99)

industrial uses may be feasible, but not anything larger.

The provision of additional infrastructure must also be done in ways that minimize sprawl and optimize existing resources. A persistent finding in every survey taken by economic development practitioners is that Rhode Island's quality of life is a very big draw to firms either wanting to move here or stay here. The need to accommodate industry with attractive sites must be balanced by the obvious interest the state has in preserving greenfields and other commodities that contribute to quality of life.

### **05-03: Conclusions**

Measures must be taken to protect the prime industrial land we already have. These include what we have already mentioned: "matching the plant [use] to the land," cleaning and recycling brownfields, using performance standards to cluster and commingle industries, promoting labor-intensive industrial sectors, and working toward the most efficient use of the land possible, including mixed uses, to conserve and stretch the resource.

We may find that certain industrial sectors with a lot of growth potential ("New Economy" firms come to mind) can be accommodated in large measure on industrial land that is less than prime, or on prime land in innovative configurations that optimize the use of space. That would certainly be welcome. On the other hand, there

is disturbing anecdotal evidence from site specialists that Rhode Island is already facing limited options with vacant or underutilized industrial sites.

We should not rezone other types of land we are trying to protect – for example, agricultural land or open space/conservation land – to secure additional industrial sites. That would be contrary to other elements of the State Guide Plan. The same principle applies to industrial land. Holding on to what we have is the crucial first step we must take.